

Babcock, Charles
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CIA Chief, at National Press Club, Cautions on Intelligence Disclosures

By Charles R. Babcock
Washington Post Staff Writer

The press' "unfettered right to print and disclose is clearly being questioned" by the American public and courts, Central Intelligence Director Stansfield Turner warned yesterday.

In a speech specifically tailored for delivery to the National Press club, Turner criticized the attention the news media give to whistleblowers and 25-year-old scandals about intelligence abuses.

Citing the recent jailing of New York Times reporter M. A. Farber for refusing to disclose sources, the nation's top intelligence officer appealed to the press to recognize similar concerns by his agency.

He called the danger of disclosing sources "the No. 1 threat" to the intelligence community, and said the risk of leaks threatens necessary operations.

Turner said one allied intelligence service withdrew from a joint covert action because it feared the plan would leak after he notified the required eight congressional committees. Foreign agents overseas also worry that their names might be printed, he said.

"Too many leaks can lead to intelligence by timidity," he said.

In response to the dangers of disclosure, Turner said, he is both tightening internal security procedures and trying to make the agency more open so real secrets will be respected.

Though Turner did not mention it yesterday, Central Intelligence Agency security procedures were reviewed recently after a former headquarters clerk was arrested and

charged with selling top-secret satellite information to the Soviets. The material was missing for months and the CIA discovered the loss only when the FBI asked officials if something was amiss.

The accused espionage agent, William Peter Kampiles, is scheduled to go on trial next week.

Turner was asked about recent problems in another case involving national security issues. A federal judge here dismissed the jury in the perjury and conspiracy trial of International Telephone & Telegraph Corp. executive Robert Berrellez Tuesday when prosecutors balked at a ruling they felt might disclose CIA information.

The CIA director, an admiral who attended the U.S. Naval Academy with President Carter, said it was his job to give Attorney General Griffin B. Bell his "subjective judgments" of how disclosures would affect the national interest.

"I claim the privilege only of ensuring that those who make the release have had the opportunity to balance the benefits of prosecution with the detriments of revelation," he said. "I see nothing different in that than in claiming privilege for Mr. Farber's notes in a murder case."

Turner's sharpest criticism was aimed at the publicity the press gives whistleblowers. "What better way to promote a forthcoming book than to titillate the public through encouraging you to issue samples of unauthorized revelations?" he asked.

He questioned the motives of such persons and added: "When every elected or appointed public official is suspect and every renegade whistleblower is automatically accepted as a hero... I suggest we as a nation are headed for trouble."

Turner tempered his criticism by saying he recognized the role the press plays as one of the overseers of the intelligence community.

"Ultimate accountability is essential to responsible action," he noted in referring to congressional oversight spawned by intelligence abuses reported in recent years.